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Cultural Transaction and Early India

ROMILA THAPAR

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CULTURAL TRANSACTION AND EARLY INDIA: TRADITION AND PATRONAGE

ROMILA THAPAR

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PREFACE

The two lectures which follow were given as the I. H. Qureishi Memorial Lectures for 1987 at St. Stephen's College, Delhi University, on 22 and 23 January 1987. I would like to thank my colleague Professor K. N. Panikkar for his comments on an earlier draft.

Romila Thapar

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1. TRADITION

A variety of beliefs about India's past have simmered over the last couple of hundred years. Some among them have come to be accepted as part of the country's cultural tradition and have been accorded the status of tradition. It may be argued that this happens when societies are searching for identity and the pronouncements of historians, particularly of cultural historians, come to be accepted as axioms. It becomes necessary therefore for historians to pause from time to time, to take stock as it were by asking whether what has come to be accepted as tradition deserves to be so accepted. This is what I propose to attempt in the two lectures. The change of focus becomes imperative either when there is new information on the past or when the process of interpreting the past undergoes change. It is primarily the latter which in this case suggests a re-assessment.

A consideration of cultural history would have to begin with an attempt at defining culture and this has been the subject of much discussion in recent decades. I can at best attempt a very brief summary.

The term culture itself has its own history. The primary meaning of culture is the cultivating of natural growth and by extension in recent times it has come to mean the cultivating of the human mind. Among historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries culture and civilization became synonymous. The association of culture was however with superior social groups. The inadequacy of this limitation contributed towards the redefinition of the term in which it was extended to include all patterns of behaviour and ways of life. Culture therefore refers to behaviour patterns socially acquired and socially transmitted by means of symbols. It includes language, tradition, customs and institutions. It is in this wider sense that I am using the term.

Furthermore, culture in relation to tradition links the past to the present. It has therefore a historical context which is as significant as the cultural form itself.

The historical process is decisive to the definition of culture, yet the understanding of Indian culture is poorly served in this respect, for it is assumed that the historical process has a static interpretation and

has remained broadly unchanged over the last century, or, that culture is a one-time event which has survived untampered with from the past to the present. From newspaper editors to prime ministers everyone pronounces on the civilization and culture of the Indian past, unblushingly unconcerned with their historical basis. There are now, at least among historians, new kinds of analyses of cultural institutions and forms. Cultural history and its analysis juxtaposes the form with those who create it and those who order its creation, and also attempts to see it as a social signal.

The continuity of culture is generally related to traditions which, in turn, are made up of cultural forms. Tradition is defined as the handing down of knowledge or the passing on of a doctrine or a technique. Cultural history implies looking analytically both at what goes into the making of a tradition as well as that which is interpreted by historians as tradition. We often assume that a form is handed down in an unchanging fashion and that what comes to us is its pristine form. However, the sheer act of handing on a tradition introduces change, and not every tradition is meticulously bonded by mnemonic or other devices to prevent interpolations or change. A tradition, therefore, has to be seen in its various phases. Even the concept of *parampara*, which at one level appears to be frozen knowledge, reveals on investigation variations and change. Traditions which we today believe have long pedigrees may on an historical analysis be found to be an invention of yesterday. In other words, what we regard as tradition may well turn out to be our contemporary requirements fashioned by the way we wish to interpret the past. Interpretations of the past have also come to be treated as knowledge and are handed down as tradition. I would like to consider some of these interpretations in their historical context, for this may clarify their validity or otherwise to being regarded as tradition.

Let me illustrate these ideas with a few examples.

The disjuncture between normative values and social reality is often so evident that it is sometimes surprising to come across normative values being taken for descriptions of reality. But it is necessary to distinguish between the organization of external reality as a theory and the reality itself. Thus, the *dharmaśāstra*s, the normative texts *par excellence*, inform us of the rules of *varṇa*. It is assumed that at least the members of the higher *varṇa* observe these rules. However, from the earliest times there are certain discrepancies. The Vedic texts refer to

various important Vedic *ṛṣi*s as *dāsīputraḥ*, being born of *dāsī*s.[1] Dīrghatamas, who is described as the son of a *dāsī*, in turn married a *dāsī* whom he is said to have found among strange people in the east, and she was mother to his son, the respected *ṛṣi* Kakṣīvant. Evidently these brahmans took the rule of exogamy literally and married far out. But equally intriguing is the origin of the compiler of the *Mahābhārata*, the learned Veda Vyāsa. His father, the *ṛṣi* Parāśara, became enamoured of a girl of a fisherman's community as she rowed him across the river. Despite her fishy odour he made his intentions clear. She resisted him at first, but finally accepted his advances when he promised that she would be rid of the odour of fish. The boat was enveloped in a discreet curtain of clouds and the now sweet-scented girl eventually gave birth to Veda Vyāsa. The ambiguity of his mother's origins are further complicated by the story that she had been an *apsarā*'s daughter abandoned as a foundling among fisher folk.[2] And this becomes a stereotype among such origin myths, raising a host of questions regarding the treatment of identity.

How are we to interpret this? First of all, and certainly, that our ancestors had a sense of humour and were willing to invent stories about these lapses from the normative perspective of even those whom they revered—a quality which is difficult to find in contemporary India, for such stories would be unheard of today. But what is more important, and once we get past the symbolic meaning, is that origins obviously do not have to conform to normative rules and were possibly not very significant.

This is even more marked in the origin myths of a variety of royal families claiming *kṣatriya* status in the post-Gupta period.[3] Prior to the Gupta dynasty the *Purāṇa*s refer to such families being of brahman and even *śūdra* origin. Few in fact were *kṣatriya* in spite of the insistence of the normative texts on the *kṣatriya* origins of ruling families. The myths of many such families of the later period, as those of the Guhilla and Candella, make one suspect that the families may have been obscure and that they sought status through fabricated genealogies, linking them to the Suryavaṃśi and Candravaṃśi lineages, which lineages seem also to have been an invention of a particular historical time.

[1] *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* 14.6.6; *Bṛhad-devatā*, 4.11–15; 21.25; *Ṛg Veda* 1.58

[2] *Mahābhārata*, Ādi parvan, 57.56.

[3] Romila Thapar, 'Genealogy as a Source of Social History', in *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*, New Delhi 1978, pp. 326–60.

In shying away from coming to terms with this divergence, we blind ourselves to the possible flexibility of a society which, in certain situations, was probably as important a characteristic as the theoretical insistence on the minutae of rules of social behaviour. We thereby provide a simplistic explanation for a complex arrangement. The concession to the brahman that he could marry into any *varṇa* was, in some ways, parallel to the incorporation of belief and ritual from a variety of sources in the making of religious sects—an incorporation which defies the forcing of what we call Hindu sects into a homogenous, uniform, clearly identifiable and ecclesiastically organized religious entity. This epitomizes a perspective different from that of the Semitic model.

But how are we to interpret high culture literature which mocks the brahman? In the plays of Kālidāsa the *vidūṣaka*—the stereotype of companion or fool—is a brahman not speaking Sanskrit and mocking the essence of brahmanism as contained in the *dharmaśāstras*. The normative texts, of course, do not carry even a hint of the *vidūṣaka* as a category of brahman. Admittedly, in a literature intended for the royal court the foil to the king could only be a brahman, since a member of another caste would amount to *lèse majestie*. But did he have to be such a non-brahmanical brahman that even the king mocks the brahman in him? Was this an ironic commentary on the *purohita* or on particular categories of brahmans elsewhere taken more seriously? So distinct a contravention of the norm can only point to the norm not being pervasive.

Talking of Kālidāsa, we assume that his version of the story of Śakuntalā was the one made familiar to people of all ages since the writing of the play. Yet Kālidāsa was himself taking an existing tradition and transforming it into something new and in keeping with his own time and place. There were two versions of the Śakuntalā story in circulation with two different audiences. The earlier version occurs in the *Mahābhārata*, where the origin myth of the founder of the Puru lineage, Bharata, is recited.[4] The story begins with a massive hunt led by the Raja Duḥṣanta, where we are told that many families of tigers were laid low and many hundreds of deer killed. The hunt, as hunts in epic literature often go, is a war against nature, causing havoc and destruction all round. Arriving at the hermitage of Kaṇva, Duḥṣanta is welcomed in the absence of the *ṛṣi* by Śakuntalā, who

[4] *Mahābhārata*, Ādi parvan, 63 ff.

happily converses with him without any reservation. When asked about her parentage she explains that she is the natural child of the *apsarā* Menakā and the *ṛṣi* Viśvāmitra and was left a foundling at the hermitage of Kaṇva. When Duḥṣanta, attracted by her beauty, proposes a Gandharva marriage, she replies in a spirited fashion that she will agree only on condition that her son is declared the *yuvarāja*, which condition Duḥṣanta accepts. A few years later she arrives at his court with their son Bharata. Although he recognizes her, Duḥṣanta pretends not to know her and, even as she argues her rights, he abuses her parents, referring to Menakā as a slut and to Viśvāmitra as a lecher, and dismisses her as a whore. Whereupon a celestial voice proclaims that the boy is in fact the child of Duḥṣanta. He then accepts both mother and son, maintaining that his earlier pretence was merely to ensure that the legitimacy of the child would be declared before his people. The story may well have been introduced as a form of genealogical latching on.

Kālidāsa introduces the sub-plot of the signet ring which drops off Śakuntalā's finger; and Duḥṣyanta (as the name occurs in Kālidāsa), loses his memory owing to a curse and does not remember the association with Śakuntalā until he sees the signet ring. In effect, the feel of the play is completely different from the epic version of the story.

Śakuntalā in the epic is a confident, high-spirited, assertive young woman who knows what she is about and is not going to be taken for a ride. In the play she is submissive, shy, reserved, perhaps even a little frightened and cowed down by her love for the king. She is the new subservient woman of upper caste courtly culture who is incapable of arguing in defence of her rights or objecting to the treatment by Duḥṣyanta. Kālidāsa has invested Śakuntalā with status. The king's major concern is the need for an heir, unlike in the epic where it is Śakuntalā who is anxious that her son be declared the *yuvarāja*. Today, we have accepted Kālidāsa's depiction of the submissive woman and have ignored the far more independent characterization of the epic version, in part at least, for reasons which have to do with attempts to justify the subservience of women with an appeal to what is regarded as 'our tradition'.

Even within the tradition, the image of Śakuntalā was not universally that of the Kālidāsa play. A larger number of people were familiar with the recitation of the *Mahābhārata* version and the epic character was better known. The heroine of the play would traditionally have had a limited audience.

The play focuses on the contrast between two backgrounds, that of the forest and the court. The hermitage, which in a sense mediates between the two, is set in a natural environment where social behaviour is in accordance with the gentleness of nature. The court is a structured background with little of nature intervening and is alien to the forest. This contrast is a repeated theme in early Indian writing. The dichotomy of the *grāma* and the *aranya* represent the two poles of the settlement and the wilderness, of order and disorder, of the known and the unknown.

Normative texts and creative literature differ in the handling of those who live in the hermitage. The normative curriculum refers, of course, only to males of the upper caste and requires a life cycle which covers the well-known four stages of studentship, householder, renouncer and ascetic. Written into this life cycle is the opposition of *grihastha* to *samnyāsa*, of householder to ascetic.[5] The brahmanical system insists on the fulfillment of the social obligations of a householder, that is, a gainful occupation and the procreation of a family, before renunciation can be thought of. In the Buddhist and Jaina systems renunciation or the entry to monkhood was open at any point in life. The brahmanical system reflects the fear that renunciation at an early age may upset the requirements of society and that the true value of renunciation comes after a socially fulfilled life. That the good *grihastha* also had many obligations towards the welfare of the brahmans should not be forgotten.

Generally, descriptions of the *āśrama* in creative literature do not depict a place of austere practices. They tend to be forest retreats set in sylvan surroundings with an emphasis on empathy with nature. That hermits had technically broken away from social obligations meant that they had no more to do with the *grāma* and were at one with the *aranya*. But somehow this did not preclude them from observing social regulations when required to do so.

Above all, through the act of renunciation and the practice of *yoga*, *tapasya* and *dhyāna*, the renouncer was believed to acquire supernormal powers. In the normative tradition renunciation was the prelude to asceticism and the means of achieving personal salvation. The distance from society was intended to underline the need for isolation and contemplation in pursuit of the goal of salvation. In a sense it was a

[5] Romila Thapar, 'Householders and Renouncers in the Brahmanical and Buddhist Tradition', in T. N. Madan (ed.), *Way of Life*, New Delhi, 1982, pp. 273–98.

selfish act in as much as it was a-social. In effect, however, as is clear from descriptive passages referring to asceticism, the supernormal powers became an asset on which the power of the ascetic was based. It was this which enables the *ṛṣi* to acquire extra-sensory knowledge, to fly through the air, to destroy through a curse or to grant boons. In the non-normative texts the *ṛṣi* acquires the same powers as the gods, and frequently the gods fear the power of the *ṛṣi* and try to break it, as was done successfully in the case of Viśvāmitra by sending Menakā to seduce him. It would seem that at one level renunciation and the renouncer became an alternative avenue of authority in the popular mind which even kings had to accept.

This was not the power of religion, since the *ṛṣi* was not a religious functionary and was not concerned with priestly activities. At the root of his power lay the ability of the renouncer to break away from society and to contravene the normative rules of social behaviour. The case of the ascetic or *samnyāsi* was more extreme, since he had to have his death rituals performed before he could take up *samnyāsa* signifying a complete break with his house-holding functions. This may in part explain why the renouncer often emerged as the symbol of dissent and protest and came to be regarded as an alternative source of power, a symbolism which has been respected even in the Indian political movements of the twentieth century. The renouncer cannot be explained away in the simplistic formula of being a religious leader since he accumulates in himself a complex inter-relation of social signals.[6] As a source of alternative authority the renouncer is distinct from both priestly power and the coercive authority of the state. The socio-political role of the renouncer is, it seems to me, a characteristic feature of Indian civilization and requires a more thorough analysis. This would question the notion that Indian society has always been other-worldly because of the attraction of renunciation. Instead, it requires that we examine more analytically the many dimensions to the role of the renouncer in society.

The institutionalizing of renunciation developed early among the Buddhists, Jainas and a variety of non-brahmanical sects referred to as Śramaṇas. Individual salvation, it was argued, was more easily obtained through renunciation and joining the *sangha* or Order—a parallel or alternative society demanding the termination of social

[6] Romila Thapar, 'Renunciation: the making of a Counter-Culture?' in *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*, New Delhi, 1978, pp. 63–104.

obligations at a personal level. But few of these renouncers cut themselves off completely. Most lived in the proximity of settlements, for it was enjoined upon the lay follower that he had to support monks with alms and gifts. Such acts would earn merit for the lay follower, and this accumulation of merit would assist him in his own salvation. The obligation to support the renouncer not only strengthened the *sangha* as an institution but also created a sense of community among lay followers. This sense of community was a contrast to the idea of *varṇāśramadharma*. *Varṇa* was the apparatus of segregation and of cordoning off groups. Buddhist social thought was more inclusive in that it cut across caste segments, and in worship and belief, at least, referred to a more universal ethic applicable to almost all. It was a community essentially of monks extended to lay followers, but not separated into castes. This sense of community may have had something to do with the aggressive hostility meted out to Buddhists and Jainas by various sects of what we have come to call the Hindu religion.

This hostility may account for the virtual weeding out of the alternative texts and perspectives, namely, those not in agreement with the brahmanical tradition, from what we now regard as our cultural heritage. Soon after the time when the secular epic the *Rāmāyaṇa* had been converted into sacred Vaiṣṇava literature by the Bhārgava brahmans and the hero Rāma had been recorded as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, a Jaina poet, Vimalasūri, in the early centuries A.D. wrote his version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Prākrit, *Paumacariyam*. It is the first of a number of Jaina versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the persistence with which the theme of what they referred to as the true *Ramayaṇa* was taken up, suggests that the Jaina authors had something significant to say. Vimalasūri states specifically that his is the true version as against that of the brahmans which is a collection of falsehoods. The broad outlines of the story are similar, but there is a significantly different treatment of Rāvaṇa and the *rākṣasas*. It is clearly stated that the *rākṣasas* are not demons and that the word is linked to the root *rakṣ*, to protect. Rāvaṇa was neither ten-headed nor a meat-eating fiend, and all that has been said about him by foolish poets—*mukhakukavi*—is untrue.

Rāvaṇa is an ardent Jaina and a protector of Jaina shrines. Being an adept at ascetic practices, he has the ability to fly and is therefore called *ākāśamārgi*. His relationship with Sītā is sensitively portrayed as that of a man genuinely fond of her and upset by her rejection of him.

The austerity of exile is frequently punctuated by prosperous villages, beautiful cities and royal palaces. The theme of exile functions as it does in all epic literature. It seeks to legitimize the association of various geographical places with the heroes of the epic. That there is a Rāma-kuṇḍ, Sītā-kuṇḍ and Pāṇḍava-lena in almost every part of the Indian subcontinent is not because the exiled heroes actually visited these areas, but because in later times, when the epics were appropriated as sacred literature in these areas, there was a desire to link local geography to the events of the epic. The theme of exile or wandering is a stereotype of epic literature and happily permits of this kind of association.

A striking difference in the *Paumacariyam* is the absence of the need to uphold the *varṇāśramadharma* and the status of the brahman. Here the brahmans are the heretics and the preachers of false doctrines who acquired their status through fraud. The most respected social group other than princes are merchants, although maximum reverence is naturally given to the Jaina *munis*. Finally, both Daśaratha and Rāma renounce the world and the Jaina ethic triumphs over the *kṣatriya* ethic.

In many ways the *Paumacariyam* is the mirror image of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* and a comparative study of the two would be most illuminating. Yet the *Paumacariyam* is dismissed as being a biased Jaina account, as though the Vālmīki version is unbiased. But the value of the *Paumacariyam* is that it presents an alternative picture growing out of an alternative system, even if it is an alternative system which has been successfully eroded from what we call our tradition.

I have already mentioned that, in creating a tradition we sometimes select from the past those normative values which may have a contemporary appeal but which may even be contrary to historical actuality. The insistence on the tradition of religious tolerance and non-violence as characteristic of Hinduism, which is built on a selection of normative values emphasizing *ahiṃsā*, is not borne out by the historical evidence. The theory is so deeply ingrained among most Indians that there is a failure to see the reverse of it even when it stares them in the face. The extremity of intolerance implicit in the notion of untouchability was glossed over by regarding it as a function of society and caste. The fact of this intolerance is now conceded so casually, that the concession is almost beginning to lose meaning. Apart from this, we also need to look at more direct examples of religious persecution. Curiously, even when historians have referred

to such activities as indications of intolerance and persecution,[7] there has been a firm refusal on the part of popular opinion to concede that Hindu sects did indulge in religious persecution.

The persecution of Buddhists in Kashmir is referred to by Hsüan Tsang, but, lest it be thought that he being a Chinese Buddhist monk was prejudiced, the testimony of Kalhaṇa in the *Rājataraṅginī* should be more acceptable. Hsüan Tsang refers to the atrocities of Mihīrakula against the Buddhists both in Punjab and in Kashmir in the sixth century A.D. Hsüan Tsang may well have been exaggerating when he lists the destruction of 1,600 Buddhist *stūpas* and *sanghārāmas* and the killing of many thousands of Buddhist monks and lay-followers.[8] Kalhaṇa gives an even fuller account of the king killing innocent people by the hundreds.[9] This is often dismissed by attributing the anti-Buddhist actions of Mihīrakula to his being a Hūna. But it should not be forgotten that he was also an ardent Śaiva and gave grants of land in the form of *agrahāra*s to the brahmans. In the words of Kalhaṇa: 'Brahmans from Gandhāra resembling himself in their habits and verily themselves the lowest of the twice-born accepted *agrahāra*s from him.' It is possible that the recently discovered *stūpa* at Sanghol in Punjab, where sculpted railings were found in the vicinity of a *stūpa* dismantled and packed away, indicates this persecution of the Buddhists. Kalhaṇa writes of an earlier persecution of Buddhists in Kashmir and the wilful destruction of a *vihāra*, again by a Śaivite king. But on this occasion the king repented and built a new monastery for the Buddhist monks.

Courtly literature, particularly plays written after the seventh century A.D., is replete with invective against Buddhist and Jaina monks who are depicted as morally depraved, dishonest and altogether what one might call the scum of the earth. Mahendravarman's *Maṭṭa-vilāsa*, a farce, is amongst the earliest plays. In the *Mudrarākṣasa* of Viśākhadatta, a constant refrain states that it is inauspicious to see a Jaina monk. The *Prabodha-candrodaya* of Kṛṣṇa Miśra, a drama of the eleventh century, dwells on the theme of a Kapālika converting a Jaina and a Buddhist monk to Śaivism by offering them wine and women, both of which they are said to hanker after. In the Śaiva temples at Khajuraho, Jaina monks, especially of the *digambara* sect,

[7] e.g. K. A. Nilakantha Sastri, *The Cholas*, Madras 1955, pp. 636, 645.
[8] *Si-yu-ki*- I. 168, 171.
[9] *Rājataraṅginī*, I. 289, 307.

are depicted in the worst possible erotic poses.[10] Such references and depictions do not amount to persecution but reflect a contemptuous attitude towards Jaina and Buddhist monks which they would doubtless have found very galling, particularly as they occur in the literature and art of aristocratic groups. The depiction of monks and ascetics as debauched may have been due to the court's contempt for a variety of ascetics, some of whom were associated with socially unacceptable practices. Such depictions in courtly literature may also have been an attempt to play down the authority associated with renouncers and ascetics in the popular mind. But it is significant that the Buddhists and Jainas are more commonly made the subject of attack.

Evidence on the persecution of Jainas by Śaiva sects comes from a variety of sources. The earliest known cave temple originally dedicated by the Jainas in Tirunelveli district was, subsequently in the seventh century, converted into a Śaiva temple.[11] This was not a case of appropriating the temple and gradually changing it. Quite clearly, the Jaina images were either destroyed or erased, sometimes only partially, and fresh Śaivite images carved in the same place. In the case of the partially erased sculpture it is possible to recognize traces of the original. Where the image is totally gouged out the desecration is visible.

The Saivite saint Jñāna Sambander is attributed with having converted the Pāṇḍya ruler from Jainism to Śaivism, whereupon it is said that eight thousand Jainas were impaled by the king. This episode is represented in painting and sculpture in medieval temples and is enacted to this day in some Siva temples during their annual festival. In later times, attempts were made to appease the Jainas by royal patrons building Jaina, Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava temples in close proximity. But in these areas the Jaina temples soon fell into disrepair whilst the others flourished.

Such activities were not restricted to a particular area. The Jaina temples of Karnataka went through a traumatic experience at the hands of the Lingāyatas or Vīraśaivas in the early second millennium A.D.[12]

[10] D. Desai, 'Placement and Significance of Erotic Sculptures at Khajuraho' in Michael Meister (ed.) *Discourses on Siva*, Bombay 1984, pp. 143–55.

[11] K. Vellaivaranan, *The First Seven Tirumunis*, Annamalai 1972, pp. 143–4; K. R. Srinivasan, 'South India', in A. Ghosh (ed.), *Jaina Art and Architecture*, Vol. II, New Delhi 1975; R. Champakalakshmi, 'Religious Conflict in the Tamil Country', *Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India*, Vol. IV. 1978.

[12] P. B. Desai, *Jainism in South India*, pp. 82–3, 101–2, 24.

This would explain in part why some Jaina texts have pejorative references to Basava, who founded the Vīraśaiva sect. The Jaina temples at Lakkuṇḍi were located in the proximity of an affluent *agrahāra* and the Vaiṣṇava brahmans accepted Mahāvīra as an incarnation of Brahma. Later, however, one of the temples was converted into a Śaiva temple. At Huli, the temple of the five Jinas was converted into a *pañcaliṅgeśvara* Śaivite temple, the five *liṅgas* replacing the five Jina images in the *sancta*.[13] Some other Jaina temples suffered the same fate. An inscription at Ablur in Dharwar eulogizes attacks on Jaina temples as retaliation for Jaina opposition to Śaivite worship.[14] Sculpted panels at this site depict the smashing of Jaina images. In the fourteenth century the harassment of Jainas was so acute that they had to appeal for protection to the ruling power at Vijayanagara.

Inscriptions of the sixteenth century from the Srisailam area of Andhra Pradesh record the pride taken by Vīrasaiva chiefs in beheading *svetāmbara* Jainas.[15] The local records of this area refer to the frequent persecution of the Jainas. In Gujarat, Jainism flourished during the reign of Kumārapāla, but his successor persecuted the Jainas and destroyed their temples.[16] However, Jainism was so well-established here that periodical persecution did not really shake it.

My purpose in drawing attention to the Śaivite persecution of Buddhists and Jainas is not an attempt at being provocative. We have here a major historical problem which requires detailed investigation. The desire to portray tolerance and non-violence as the eternal values of the Hindu tradition has led to the pushing aside of such evidence. That there were mutual intellectual borrowings in certain philosophical schools should not prevent us from seeing the reality on the ground. If there were cases of diverse religious sects co-existing, there were also situations of antagonism. The evidence of persecution raises the question of the degree to which such activities on the part of various religious groups were seen as a way of claiming ascendancy and power.

A related question is whether the Hindus as a community were

[13] M. A. Dhaky, personal communication. See also James Burgess, Report of the First Season's operations in the Belgam and Kaladgi Districts, Jan. to May 1874, *ASWI*, No. 1, reprint Varanasi 1971, p. 12.

[14] *Epigraphia Indica*, V. p. 237.

[15] P. B. Desai, *Jainism in South India*.

[16] S. B. Deo, 'Expansion of Jainism', in A. Ghosh (ed.), *Jain Art and Architecture*, Vol. II.

aware of or perpetrated this hostility, or whether it was perpetrated only by a segment of the Hindu community, substantially the Śaivas. An historical evaluation of such persecutions would be required to ascertain the sects involved and their social affinities. If only certain segments of society, whether castes or sects, were involved, the effect of these on other segments would be worth inquiring into, as also the influence of religious militancy on the segment itself. Would these actions have had an impact on the values associated with the Hindu community, assuming, of course, that there was at this time the consciousness of a single Hindu community? The argument put forward in recent times that the Buddhists, Jainas and a variety of Hindu sects were all part of the compendium religion we call Hinduism has also contributed to these animosities being dismissed as minor sectarian rivalries, whereas the evidence points to a different assessment.

It is historically important to know why this persecution of the Buddhists and Jainas occurred in particular by the Śaivas. I can only offer a few comments. At the religious level, it may have had to do with asceticism. Was Śiva seen as the ascetic *par excellence* and the patron deity of ascetics, and were Buddhist and Jaina monks seen as imposters? Did Buddhist and Jaina monks find the worship of the *lingam* offensive owing to the puritanism inherent in both these systems? Yet the Tantric versions of these systems conceded to practices and ideas which were opposed to puritanism. If the hostility related only to religious differences, then it should have surfaced earlier in time. It is interesting that it begins about the middle of the first millennium A.D. and gains force through the centuries until Buddhism eventually fled the country and Jainism was effectively limited to a few pockets. The persecution predates the coming of Islam to these areas, so that the convenient excuse that Islamic persecution caused the decline of these religions is not applicable.

The rise of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sects was often tied to *bhakti*, and in the peninsula some sections of these sects were often the agencies of intolerance. Was the relationship between the devotee and his deity so intense that it led to an inability to tolerate other forms of religious expression? *Bhakti* teachers appealed to professional groups which gradually became socially significant—not necessarily by rising in the social scale, but by mobilizing themselves as social entities. The social organization of these religious groups differed. Whereas the Buddhists and Jainas built upon a sense of community incorporating a universalizing ethic, Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva sects tended to be more narrowly

demarcated. In a sense some of the contemporary Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sects which emerged in the peninsula were protest movements articulating a new social identity, and this may have led to conflict. But this argument would not, of course, apply to the persecution of Buddhists in Kashmir. Here it appears to have been a confrontation between the Śramaṇas and the brahmans, drawing on a long history of earlier animosities and where the ruling groups were also involved. The hostility would have had to do with competition for royal patronage, apart from other factors. In the case of hostility between the Vīraśaivas and the Jainas it would seem that, among other things, it resulted from competition for commercial power and patronage and the hostilities were between social groups, with an appeal to the State for protection. By the late first millennium A.D. the Buddhists in eastern India, and the Jainas in Gujarat and the peninsula, had large monastic estates, or else the monasteries were financed from the revenue of a large number of villages assigned to them by royalty. Some of the hostility, therefore, may have arisen over the control of property. The Jainas in the peninsula were certainly a socially dominant group in competition with other similar groups. The recognition and analysis of intolerant behaviour would tell us something about the way in which social groups perceived each other.

I have been emphasizing Śaiva hostility, which is not to suggest that the Vaiṣṇavas were altogether partial to Buddhists and Jainas. But there seem to be fewer examples of persecution by the Vaiṣṇavas. This, too, requires an explanation. An obvious explanation is that the *avatāra* theory of Vaiṣṇvism made it an assimilative religion except, of course, that the incorporation of a cult was generally after it had been emasculated. Thus, the Buddha in some late texts came to be treated as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. The underlying strength of this religious induction was that the *avatāra* was a-historical, in other words, the historicity of the *avatāra* and his being located in space and time was irrelevant to the religious process. This was, of course, in striking contrast to the historicity of the founders of various Vaiṣṇava sects. Unlike contemporary Hindu movements today, which seek to find birth-places and historicity for the *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu and even drag in archaeology in the attempt to prove this, such searches were of little concern to the majority of the Vaiṣṇavas in the past. It becomes pertinent, therefore, to inquire into the question of the period of history when the need for historicity enters belief in the *avatāra*s, and why.

The persecution of Buddhists and Jainas was not a principal concern with all Hindu sects; nevertheless it was socially important enough to be recorded by some. If there had been a Hindu community with an all-India identity, it would have been aware of the intolerance of some of its constituents and pronounced upon it. That this intolerance is not characteristic of the entire community does not suggest the tolerance of Hindus, but, rather, that the consciousness of community determined by a religious identity, based on certain essential uniformities and cutting across segmental differences, may not have been prevalent.

The term 'Hindu' is used for the first time in Arabic sources referring to the inhabitants of the subcontinent across the Indus. For them it simply meant the indigenous. It does not appear to have been appropriated by those who constitute what we today call the Hindu community until very much later. The historical context suggests that it did not connote a specific identity but was intended to include those who were neither Muslim nor Christian. It would be worth investigating whether historically the label 'Hindu' became a convenient umbrella under which to include a large number of segments which lay outside the more identifiable followers of Islam and Christianity. In the case of Islam and Christianity the religious identity cut across caste and sectarian concerns. There was no such clear-cut religious identity among what have been called Hindu castes and sects where the caste and sectarian identity was primary. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to see the latter as separate communities. The putting together of these latter groups into what came to be seen as the Hindu community was however important to the process of nation-building in recent times.

The religious identity among groups which had constituted what has come to be called the Hindus was earlier a series of sectarian identities rather than one of a universalizing kind. Such an identity would require close and effective communication if action as a community was at stake. Even at the levels of the political elite, and given their use of a common language, Sanskrit, there appears to have been little communication. During the years when Rajendra Cola was campaigning in the south and the east, Mahmud of Ghazni was attacking the temple towns of north-western India. One would expect that this onslaught on Hinduism, as it is described today, would have found some reference in the court of one who was then the greatest Hindu king. However, such reflections are absent. What is equally curious is that the Kashmiri poet Bilhaṇa, the biographer of the

Cālukya king, Vikramāditya VI mentions in the concluding canto of the *Vikramānka-deva-carita* that he visited Somanātha, and goes on to make disparaging remarks about the local Gujaratis but makes no mention of the attack on the temple by Mahmud: and this biography was written about three generations after the attack. Are we not, then, perhaps exaggerating or being imprecise when we talk today about the existence of an all-India Hindu community during those times? There appear, instead, to have been a number of segments largely determined by caste, custom, language and region; and only at certain levels were religious identities recognizable as being similar. For the rest, caste identities probably were more significant and the religious belief systems and actions of particular castes may have had some common features. There was certainly geographical mobility among brahmans and a certain degree of universality among them too, but this was not a Hindu identity in the sense of enveloping people at all levels in all sects. Śankarācārya, for instance, organized a Śaivite brahman identity which was only a segment of and did not include the totality of what is today called a Hindu identity. Even the observance of *varṇa-aśrama-dharma* remained a normative aspiration. Differences of language, customary law and worship kept the segments segregated.

It is important to differentiate between common civilizational symbols, which are recognized over an area, and the consciousness of a community acting towards common social and religious goals. Whereas the former was evident in India the latter appears not to have been so. It is also worth examining the possibly different role of the inter-relation between religion and society in such a caste and sect-based system. Historians have long looked at religions in India, whether indigenous or imported, from the perspective of the teachings of the texts. If religion in the past has to be properly understood, this obviously has to be related to the practice and perceptions of the religious groups. Tolerance and persecution has to do with such perceptions. It is worth noticing, for example, that in the early encounter between religious sects in India and Islam, Muslims were rarely referred to as such. The terms used were either ethnic—Turuṣka/Turk, or geographical—Yavana/West Asian, or the more generalized *mleccha*, meaning impure and covering a wide range of non-Muslims as well. This is a very different perception of 'the other' from what we have tried to make of it by postulating a society divided into Hindus and Muslims.

The Hindu community as an all-India phenomenon identifying

itself as a large community encompassing all aspects of 'Hindu' belief and worship appears to have been a development of recent centuries. The notion may well have been encouraged not only by the adoption of the label 'Hindu', but also by the use of this label by Orientalist scholarship, which attempted to format Hinduism as an historically evolved religion along the lines of Christianity, and by the demands of political representation as they emerged in the nineteenth century. Here the term Hindu connotes effectively the capturing and claiming of almost all religious belief and practice other than that associated with Islam and Christianity. It bunches together a range of religious sects, some so antithetical to each other that it is difficult to accept them under one label. This perhaps also explains the ease with which that pre-eminent institution, the Ramakrishna Mission, can claim to be both Hindu and non-Hindu.

For such a diverse community to create a uniform cultural tradition for itself can become an exercise in juggling with history. Traditions are not self-created: they are consciously chosen, and the choice from the past is enormous. We tend, therefore, to choose that which suits our present needs. The choice has its own logic and we are perhaps not fully aware of the directions which such choices may take. If we are to understand the role of religion in the Indian society of earlier times we may have to move away from the paradigm of Hinduism and the other religions in India as projected in the colonial period. There has to be an awareness of social relations actually experienced and the representation of these by particular social groups. In the search for a cultural tradition Hindus turn to normative texts and the brahmanical tradition as the exemplars from the past. This has the advantage that it acts as a kind of all-purpose Sanskritization. But it excludes a large range of both valuable and essential cultural experience. Complex societies have competing value systems and attempts are made by the more established to delete ideologies of protest or of divergent values, as I have tried to show. The awareness of the historical context of a cultural form or an ideological supposition may help us understand that cultural forms change their function over time, both through the internal development of the form and through the imprint of external factors. In other words, cultural forms are embedded in social realities and when we consciously choose a cultural form we should be aware of this reality. It is only then that the choice becomes intelligible.

In this lecture I have attempted to show that we have a variety of beliefs about India's past which have been projected as part of our

cultural traditions. We speak of a well-regulated society characterized in all cases by an observance of caste rules, but we pay less attention to instances where these rules were not observed. The latter would go contrary to the tradition, but would provide insights into nauances of social dispositions and perhaps foster a variant tradition about the functioning of society. We see the tradition of renunciation largely as a search for individual salvation with an emphasis on the value of other-worldliness, but miss out the importance of the seemingly contradictory role of the renouncer as a figure of authority in society. We insist on the tradition of tolerance and non-violence as an essential feature of Hindu practice and, by neglecting the evidence to the contrary, diminish our understanding of the religious and social inter-relations of a major part of India's cultural past. This aspect would be further illuminated if we had a more precise historical view of at least the concept of community, instead of assuming its existence in a particular form from earlier times. Communities in contemporary India, be they Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian or whatever, seek legitimacy by asserting a long history for their existence. This claim relates closely to our understanding of a secular society in the present. A more precise comprehension of the community in Indian history would clarify some of the problems of the present day as well. Our understanding of all these institutions from the past is closely related to our perceptions of ourselves in the present. It is imperative therefore that historical legitimacy should not be given arbitrarily without first ascertaining its historical viability.

2. PATRONAGE

In the previous lecture I tried to relate the notion of what we accept as cultural traditions to the historical process within which they have to be viewed. I would now like to take up a few cultural symbols which have conventionally gone into the making of what we regard as some of India's cultural traditions, and look more closely at the levels of meaning which inhere to such symbols. This category of cultural symbols presupposes the creator of the form and the person for whom it is created: a relationship which is founded on the notion of an exchange between the two. It is not an equal exchange, for it often involves that which is tangible with that which is intangible. The exchange hinges on the question of patronage, which is central to the continuity of cultural symbols in society. It also introduces the social manifestations of the symbol.

When we refer to the Indian cultural inheritance we tend to focus on forms of expression, whether it be the crafts, poetry, architecture, values or whatever, and frequently forget the exchange relationships which were crucial to these forms and which imbued them with a social function without which they may not have survived. By social function I do not mean merely the mundane use of an object or form, but rather its multiple role within society. Its survival is inherently tied to the historical process since the cultural symbol changes in accordance with historical change and is rarely static either in form or in social function. We tend today to treat cultural symbols from the past as if they existed in a vacuum, unrelated to space and time and pick out and isolate them in accordance with our contemporary definitions of past culture as well as our present needs. But even traditions are not self-created: they are socially controlled, both in their making as well as in the selection from them of what is required for contemporary purposes. It seems to me, then, that in order to understand the cultural symbol and its role in a tradition, we need to explore more fully the relationship of exchange or patronage involved in the fashioning of the cultural form and its social reference points. If I am not discussing the act of creativity here it is not because I find it unimportant, but because my emphasis for the moment is on different matters.

The definition of patronage is popularly treated as a restricted one: the wealth given by a person of superior status to an artist to enable the latter to produce a work of art. But the act of patronage is neither so restricted nor so simple. It implies a variety of social categories which participate in the making of the cultural object; implicit also is the understanding of the institution which is created from the act of patronage and has social manifestations. It becomes the legitimizer of the patron and, in addition, to a possible role of authority, may take on other social roles. Not least of all is the consideration of the audience to which the act of patronage is directed, which may operate as the arbiter of the patronage in question. Patronage therefore can act as a cultural catalyst.

Let me illustrate this with a few examples.

I would like to begin with the most simple and most direct example of what might be called man-to-man patronage. I am referring to the *dāna-stuti* hymns of the *Ṛg Veda*.[1] A bard composed a hymn in praise of his patron who was often the chief of a clan. The occasion for this was a successful cattle raid against a neighbouring chief or tribe in which the chief and his followers captured a large number of cattle and, preferably, a few herders as well. The occasion was of central importance to a society and economy where a cattle raid was one of the two ways of increasing a herd—the other being breeding. The newly acquired herd was distributed among the clansmen, with doubtless the chief keeping a major share. From this wealth he rewarded the bard who had composed the *stuti* or the eulogy on the chief. And as reward the bard received lavish gifts of head of cattle and horse, gold, chariots and slave-girls. Hence the seeming man-to-man relationship.

But this relationship had a wider dimension. The bard argued that it was his invocation to the deities which resulted in a victorious raid, and this, together with the eulogy, required a reward from the chief. The gift from the chief was thus his due reward. In the eyes of society the status of the chief was further enhanced by the eulogy. The *stuti* was not only the *rājā*'s claim to fame but it reiterated his right to be a *rājā*. In the act of gift-giving a transference of wealth took place between the chief and the bard which, in a society based on reciprocal economic relations, was a significant act. Not least, such bards claimed that they had bestowed immortality on the chief, and how right they were, for we now know of the existence of these *rājā*s largely from the

[1] As for example, *Ṛg Veda*, 8.5; 6.27; 8.46; 10.93; 8.1; 1.126; 10.107.

dāna-stuti hymns. Those chiefs who were magnanimous in their gifts were held by the bards as models and it was suggested that other chiefs should follow their example

This nexus between bard and chief receives social sanction and becomes rooted in society. It is incarnated repeatedly when society changes and is germane to the multiplicity of *praśastis* or eulogies in later times, although the form undergoes a mutation. The briefest but most fulsome in praise occur in inscriptions from the Gupta period onwards, with the most famous of the early ones being on Samudragupta. More elaborate forms occur in the biographies of kings referred to as the *carita* literature. The biography of Harṣavardhana, the *Harṣa-carita* of Bāṇa, and the later *Vikramānka-deva-carita* of Bilhaṇa whose patron was the Cālukya king Vikramāditya VI, come to mind as better examples of this genre. The *praśastis* were not concerned primarily with recording factual evidence but were involved in the same matters which have been mentioned earlier. The eulogy legitimized the status of the ruler, and this was particularly necessary where the rule of primogeniture had been broken; it underlined the expectations from a just king; it bestowed immortality on the ruler, as is evident from cases where the poet was specially invited to compose the *praśasti*; it recognized the role of poets as part of the royal entourage. Such texts were not meant to be taken literally. In effect, they give us an elaborate view of the courtly culture much prized at that time.

Buried in them, however, was also the genealogical element central to those making claims to status. In a society where status was ostensibly conditioned by birth, it was necessary to claim the highest lineage connections. These were provided to families that had risen politically by genealogists whose authority in relation to their patron was substantial. The eulogy became the rhetoric of this relationship. Since he passed judgement on a man of high status, the bard acquired an independent authority and was regarded as inviolate, and could, if he chose, become the articulator of dissent. His pronouncements on the legitimacy of the king placed him in a sense outside the hierarchy of caste. Thus, in some states of Rajasthan, if he disapproved of the action of the king, the bard would proclaim that he wished to fast unto death—what was called a *dharnā*—and, if he died, the guilt for his death would rest on the king. The king would, in fact, be guilty of the death of his legitimizer. The social reference of the bard in such situations was therefore more than a mere poet composing eulogies. The *praśasti* was not merely a courtly gesture or the creation of a new

literary genre, for it carries many other meanings and assumptions. The author was integral to social and political articulation.

I have so far referred to the cultural form as manifest in primarily non-tangible ways. *Stutis* and *praśastis* were largely compositions to be recited and heard, even when they were recorded in writing. I would like to turn to another kind of cultural idiom, the three dimensional form of monuments which are visible on the physical landscape. Monuments from the past are generally regarded as architectural forms encapsulating aesthetic formulae and religious statements and are today evaluated and discussed largely in these terms. But implicit in monuments is a gamut of meanings which need to be made more explicit if the monument is to be fully understood. I would like to take as an example the *stūpa* as a cultural symbol, but, for reasons which I hope will become evident, limit the discussion to the *stūpa*s at Sanchi, Bharhut and Amaravati.[2] The *stūpa* begins as a small commemorative tumulus or one enshrining relics. At this point its social function is limited. However, the change of patronage also changes the scope not only of its aesthetic and religious symbolism but incorporates a range of social statements which give it a meaning additional to that of its original form.

We are so accustomed to giving dynastic labels to everything from the past that, for a long time, such monuments have been described as Śuṅga or Sātavāhana art. Yet the dynasties of the Śuṅgas and the Sātavāhanas were only marginally involved, if at all, with these monuments. The patrons were the communities of traders, artisans, guilds of craftsmen, small-scale landowners—the *seṭṭhigahapati* families—and monks and nuns. Mention is made of guilds of ivory-carvers and corn dealers, of weavers, potters, perfumers, bead-makers, garland-makers, timber merchants, cloak-makers, blacksmiths, masons and builders.[3] Only a smattering of families from royalty or high political and administrative office are listed. Fortunately, these monuments are studded with votive inscriptions—the pious records of those who contributed towards their construction. Examples of this category of patronage are available from the second century B.C. to the fourth century A.D. In some cases this form of patronage becomes unique where the craftsmen who actually work on the object of patronage are themselves the patrons, as in the case of the ivory-

[2] J. Marshall and A. Foucher, *Monuments of Sanchi*, Vols. I–III, Calcutta, 1940.

[3] *Epigraphia Indica*, V. Lüders List of Inscriptions. See inscriptions from Bharhut and Amaravati.

carvers' guild from Vidiśā who sculpted part of the gateways at Sanchi. The themes depicted at these sites were commensurate with the life and aspirations of these social groups. Not surprisingly, stories from the *Jātaka* literature are frequently illustrated.

The link with earlier forms of patronage is at one level the act of gift-giving or *dāna*, although the context of the gift is different in each case. The gift in the earlier system was given by one person to another, not necessarily in a personal capacity, since it was often determined by the status and function of the two persons concerned. Community patronage, which is what distinguishes the particular *stūpa* architecture discussed here, was largely a collection of individual gifts brought together through a religious identity and a more loosely defined social identity. The gift was made initially at least for personal reasons and not because of the requirements of status or function. This possibly changed over time. Donation involved an exchange of a gift (*dāna*) in return for merit (*puṇya*). The gift was a gift of a collectivity but at the same time its record was personalized. The gift went towards the building of a religious institution, the Buddhist *sangha*. In the earlier system the patron and the recipient had a reciprocal dependence and the objects exchanged tended to be inalienable. In the case of a gift to the Buddhist *sangha* it took the form of wealth or labour, both of which were alienable, and the relation between the donor and the *sangha* was voluntary. The significant difference here was the creation of a more tangible cultural form, which became the nucleus of a more complex social institution. Artisans as patrons reflect social mobilization in a period of social change with possibilities of upward mobility. Such patronage points, therefore, to the respect given to artisans, at least by urban society. In contrast to this, the *dharmaśāstra*s rate artisans as socially low. Artisan guilds and even financiers' guilds became a feature of the urban landscape during this time. The hereditary recruitment to the guild and endogamous marriage encouraged the conversion of a guild into a *jāti*. Guild donations were, therefore, potentially caste donations, but obviously extending over more than one caste. Some of these artisans and guilds were doubtless also seeking both status and publicity by recording their donations, quite apart from merit. The ivory-carvers' guild which sculpted the gateway at Sanchi may well have achieved renown, and may have been the same which carved some of the exquisite ivory panels so reminiscent of the Sanchi gateway, which found their way to the city of Begram in Afghanistan, a royal centre of the Kuṣāṇas.

Donations were both specific to a monastery as in the case of Kanheri, Karle, Bedsa and the other numerous rock-cut monasteries of the Deccan, as well as more generalized for the benefit of the community, as at the *stūpa*s at Sanchi, Bharhut and Amaravati. In the former, the spectacular *caitya* halls are often surrounded by contrastingly bare monastic cells. Both *stūpa* and monastery encapsulated the power of the *sangha* as an institution, and the *stūpa* became its recognized symbol. The sacred structure with its casket of relics was demarcated from profane space by a railing with elaborately sculpted gateways. Contributions towards the construction of the railings and the adorning of gateways was an act of piety involving the entire community of believers. The *sangha*, consisting of a body or renouncers, was regarded as an alternative source of authority which governed both social and religious life. When those in political authority were patrons of the building of the *stūpa* they were seeking legitimation from the *sangha* apart from their personal piety. When the community as such helped build the *stūpa* it was seeking the protection of this alternative authority as well as invoking it. Monuments therefore were never merely religious or artistic edifices with functions limited to the performance of ritual. Inevitably, there were also levels of authority written into the symbolic understanding of the monument. Such authority was almost tangible where the monument supported a religious institution. Possibly, this may in part account for their vulnerability to attacks from competing religious sects.

The votive inscriptions provide evidence on the wide networks of geographical contacts, indicating yet another dimension to the concept of a Buddhist community. Donors belonged to various parts of the Deccan, although local donations were of course high in number. The location of the monuments along trade routes would point to urban connections or with market centres. Some donations at Karle near Poona came from Buddhist Yavana traders from Afghanistan, and possibly even Egypt as part of the Roman trade with the west coast of India. The extensive geographical net was drawn together by the appeal to a community of common belief, ritual and religious identity.

Other kinds of links were also known. Members of a royal family invested money in a guild, the interest of which went towards financing some aspect of the Buddhist *sangha*. Here a different kind of nexus is established which still draws on patronage but of a less obvious kind and brings together royalty, commercial interests and the *sangha*. In this case the gift plays a dual role—as donation as well as investment.

One of the more striking aspects of these donations is the number of women donors. Donations from queens and women of the royal family are, of course, known from the early phases of many Buddhist sites. Since it had to include more than a single religious sect, royal patronage, being in theory above the competition for patronage, seems in the early period to have handled the division along gender lines. Where kings presided over brahman *yajñas* their wives and sisters made donations to Buddhist monuments.

What are however far more notable are the donations of ordinary women to the building and adornment of *stūpas* and *caityas*. These come in larger numbers from the families of small-scale landowners, traders and artisans. In the case of donations of land the names of the women are listed as part of a family. But more generally contributions are linked to individual names. Sometimes the donations are made by husband and wife. On other occasions by a mother and son or by sisters, but many are just the names of single women. What is even more interesting is that almost half the women who have recorded their donations individually were nuns, and, indeed, even among male donors large numbers of monks are listed. This raises a host of questions. Did these women share in rights to the family property? In the case of a single woman making a donation, was this part of her *stri-dhana*, the wealth given to her by her mother and over which she in theory had complete control? It seems curious that such records are more frequent in Buddhist and Jaina contexts than in those of other religious sects. The over-ruling of the Buddha's objections to an order of nuns was apparently an act of great foresight. It seems that women had a distinctly better status in the so-called heterodox sects than in brahmanism. Such women clearly did not regard Sītā as their role model, nor do they appear to have paid much attention to the injunctions of the Manu *Dharmaśāstra* requiring women in every stage of life to be subservient to men. Of course, the association of women with this kind of donation, suggestive of a particular status, is prevalent during a specific time and in relation to a specific objective.

Community patronage of this kind began to decline from the mid-first millennium A.D. I have used the term community in the context of the Buddhist *stūpa* and this may require some explanation. Those that donate to the *stūpa* belong by and large to castes spread across the social spectrum, although the majority belonged to the middle levels. The donations collected for the creation and embellishment of the *stūpa* represent a religious community and there are a

large number of small donations. There were also other Buddhist monuments built substantially from royal donations, and these would not be included in the category of community patronage, although they were similar in architectural form. The sense of community among the Buddhists saw them as participating in an identity which drew on a uniformly recognized religious practice and belief historically evolved and cutting across segmental differences. This is not to suggest that there were no sectarian differences within Buddhism. But the sects within Buddhism related themselves to a common historically evolved religion, to differences of interpretation of the original teaching, and to the preceding forms of religious practice. Such sects are dissimilar to the sects within Hinduism, many of which have diverse origins, do not necessarily relate to the same set of historical events and some of which repudiated the very texts regarded by others as the foundation of their religion. Even in this case, however, the question which needs to be investigated is whether the Buddhist community, as evident from the votive inscriptions discussed, continued to have the same identity in later periods and in relation to other parts of the country. Possibly this sense of community was tied to particular historical circumstances and, as was often the case with such self-perceptions, may well itself have undergone a change.

In contrast to this Buddhist sense of community, a guild of silk weavers also built a temple to Sūrya in central India, but contributions were collected from only one guild, even though its members were no longer professionally confined to silk weaving.[4] In this case, the notion of community is more limited. It neither includes other guilds nor other worshippers of Sūrya. Royal and aristocratic patronage gradually came to predominate and supersede community patronage. This is noticeable even in the western Deccan at Ellora and Ajanta. The importance of the *stūpa* as a symbol seems to give way slowly to *caitya* halls and *vihara*s. The new patronage, being very substantial, enabled the maintenance of large monasteries. It was this, again, which became the pattern in eastern India, with Nalanda financed by the endowment of a hundred if not two hundred villages, and other monastic centres such as Vikramaśīla and Paharpura equally well off. The smaller collections made by traders and artisans were giving way to the lavish endowments of royalty. The focus shifted to strengthening

[4] Mandasor Inscription. J. F. Fleet, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III, pp. 79 ff.

the monastic establishment. The *sangha* therefore, had now to function to a greater extent than before as a landowner and a propertied institution. As such, it came into competition with other religious institutions which were also receiving endowments from royalty, namely, the temples of various Hindu sects.

The genesis of the temple appears to have been a small shrine-room housing an image as the nucleus of a cult. This is suggested by one of the earliest examples of the Gupta period located in the shadow of the Sanchi *stūpa*. The single room acquired adjoining structures. With the conversion of a cult into a sect with a following, and the patronage of local political authority also thrown in, the small shrine evolved into the complex structure associated with Hindu temples. The temple comes to dominate the landscape when it takes the form of a structure as determined by architects, builders and craftsmen—the *sūtradhāra*, *sthāpati* and *śilpin*. As with the *stūpa*, it is initially an architectural form built to identify a place of worship. But from the moment of its expansion it takes on the qualities of a social symbol and, in many cases, a very complicated one.

The Simhachalam temple in the Vishakhapatanam district of Andhra Pradesh is one such example.[5] Its history and function is by no means unique, nor is it the largest of temples. It is merely one among many others in the country, and its evolution follows a pattern which, in its broad outline, is repeated elsewhere in the late first and early second millennium A.D. It arose in the proximity of Buddhist structures and is said to be located at the site of one. A number of Hindu temples have Buddhist sites lurking in their foundations. The earliest votive inscription of the eleventh century is that of a merchant. But in the subsequent five centuries merchant donations are few, and the five hundred and odd inscriptions on its walls recording donations are largely of members of royal families of the various dynasties which ruled in the area, their ministers and commanders—the *mahāpātras* and *senāpatis*—their officers and their feudatories, a different clientele from those of the Buddhist *stūpas* of the Deccan. The eleventh century temple was destroyed in the thirteenth century and even its inscribed stones were used as building material for the new temple at the site. Thus, some of the earlier records were built casually into the walls of the new temple and are lost to us. The district saw a fast turn-over of political authorities, the Cālukya-Colas, Eastern Gaṅgas, Kākatīyas,

[5] K. Sundaram, *The Simhachalam Temple*, Waltair, 1969.

Gajapatis, Vijayanagara and eventually the Sultans of Golconda in the late sixteenth century. Dynastic changes are evident not only from the votive inscriptions but also from the mixture of architectural styles from Orissa, Telengana and South India, and from the iconographical features of the wide ranging images with mutations tied both to sculptural injunction and local beliefs.

A complaint was taken to the Sultan of Golconda that Muslim soldiers had vandalized the temple. The Sultan sent an officer to sort out the matter and make endowments for the brahmans attached to the temple and reactivate it. In the late eighteenth century there were a series of Maratha raids in the area and it is not clear from the records whether the temple was safe from them. There is a conspicuous absence of any Maratha donations.

In the nineteenth century parts of the earlier thirteenth century soft-stone structures began to decay and damaged the temple, requiring extensive repairs. Local opinion now insists that these repairs were required because the temple was damaged by 'the Muslims'.

The central shrine room houses a curious image of Varāha-Narasimha Viṣṇu. The image was originally a Śiva-liṅgam. But, after an extended visit from Rāmānuja, the temple was converted to Vaiṣṇavism. The *sthala-purāṇa* of the temple relates the story that he ordered the existing lingam to be cut and sculpted to the form of Viṣṇu Narasimha. Halfway through this process the icon began to bleed and, in great fear, the sculptors appealed to Rāmānuja, who then ordered them to stop their work. Hence it remains an incomplete image, and when it is covered with sandal-paste, as it is most of the time, it continues to look like a *lingam*.

The thirteenth-century temple boasted of a vestibule, a porch, an assembly-hall, a *nātya maṇḍapam* and a variety of halls for special festivals, not to mention a surround of shrines to subsidiary deities. The treasury where the substantial jewels of the deities were kept adjoined the temple, and beyond the outer courtyard were the temple tanks, the gardens and the structures which housed the vehicles of the deity.

Donations to the temple endowed it with extensive assets. The large acreages of arable land were leased out to tenants. Revenue had to be collected from these, as also from the villages which the temple received as endowments. In some instances, this revenue permitted the temple to act as a bank—not only for rural credit but also to finance trading guilds. The daily offerings of cash and jewels had to be

registered. All this required a large number of functionaries. The head of the temple was given the appropriate title of *bhoga parīkṣā* and he was both the religious head as well as the superintendent or *adhikāri* of the administration of the temple. The rituals were performed by a body of priests and mention is made of thirty brahmans in this category. The assistants who helped them with the ritual were distinct from the pandits and the *adhyāpaka*s who recited the purāṇic and epic texts. Their number had reached fifty-two in the nineteenth century. Lower down the social scale were the musicians, torch bearers and the *devadāsi*s, and of the latter mention is made of one hundred in the thirteenth century. The administration of the temple had a separate hierarchy of office-bearers, including the treasurer/*bhaṇḍāri*, accountants/*śrikarnam*s, goldsmiths, stonemasons, carpenters and iron smiths, as also those employed as attendants and palanquin bearers, sweepers and cleaners, elephant keepers, *śūdra*s who cultivated the flower gardens as well as herdsmen from the tribe of the Boyas to tend the many thousand head of cattle and sheep owned by the temple. Religious and administrative offices were hereditary and incumbents were paid with endowments of land or a share of the offerings.

The temple was, in fact, a large estate employing hundreds of people in various capacities. Not surprisingly, the ritual treated the chief deity as a dominant landowner in a *jajmani* system. The economic assets were held in the name of the deity and the employees performed services for the deity. The social hierarchy was perhaps more easily maintained in a system of service relationships. Power was enhanced where the temple authorities not only collected taxes but also exercised judicial rights. Additional income came in at the time of fairs and festivals and from pilgrims. The temple was often the major agricultural entrepreneur of the region, bringing new land under cultivation. Commerce was also encouraged, not only by the markets catering to pilgrims from various places, but also by traders bringing in exotic items, such as perfumes, musk, rosewater and camphor to be used in ritual.

The temple, therefore, represented a continuum of functional and symbolic meanings. For some it was the cosmic body of the deity or the cosmic form of the universe. Its architecture and sculpture were the articulation of theories on aesthetics and iconography. The music and dance of the *devadāsi*s were integrated into musicology and, at another level, the *devadāsi*s were regarded as sacred concubines. The *maṭha*s attached to the temple for training the priests developed into

centres of sectarian activity as well as centres for formal education and debate. The recitation of the epics, *purāṇa, kathā* and *kāvya* to audiences of pilgrims and devotees assisted the process of interaction and the assimilation of the 'high' culture with the local culture. For the devotee the temple was a sanctified place of worship. For the king it was both a place of worship and a source of legitimation. This led to successive rulers from a variety of dynasties recording a donation on the temple walls. It became a nucleus of loyalty to the king, and this was particularly necessary where there was a fast change of fortunes among royal families. As a nucleus of loyalty it would draw not only on the institution but also on the networks of devotees and pilgrims. And who with any political sense does not know that the loyalty of local factions is of the utmost importance in building a political base? So great was the need for this political base that a military outpost was established at the temple as early as the eleventh century.

The state saw the temple as a revenue collecting institution as well, and, even if the revenue did not come to the state, the amount was so large nevertheless and the management of cash and endowments so complex that it required some state supervision. The Gaṅga dynasty therefore established a high-ranking officer—the *Kaliṅga parīkṣā*—to supervize the fiscal and administrative work of the temple functionaries and act as a liaison between the temple and its royal patrons. It has thus been argued that the temple became a political outpost of the Gaṅgas.

Inscriptions on a temple wall are legal documents recording the property rights and administrative functioning of the temple. The recording of donations from royalty and from officers of the upper levels of administration was as much symbolic of their political supremacy as of their religious identity. The temple as an institution was a recipient of a transfer of wealth, and this exchange in the form of patronage established a reciprocal relationship between those who ruled and required legitimation to rule and those who provided the legitimation and were supported financially by their patrons. This was in a sense a more complicated projection of the rather simple relationship which I referred to at the start of the lecture, namely, that between the bard and the chief via the *dānastuti*. Whether the form was that of the eulogy or the *stūpa* or the temple, in each case it was the act of patronage which was germinal to the creation of a form and a set of relationships.

A temple was more than a place of worship. It was an institution

and, as such, paralleled the *sangha* and acquired a status similar to that of the dominant property owners of the time. It could house a deity who on occasion would be regarded as the suzerain overlord by the reigning king and thus acted as a further source of legitimacy. The Gaṅgas are known to refer to themselves as the feudatories—*rauta*—of Jagannath at Puri. Temple ritual imitated the daily routine of the royal household and the deity was treated at least as a feudal chief if not the overlord. As an institution, and through the services it required, it integrated a hierarchy of castes from brahmans to *śūdra*s with each one assigned its duties related as closely as possible to the normative rules of the *dharmaśāstra* texts. Possibly, only in the institution of the temple were the normative texts sought to be literally applied. It also reiterated strongly the segregation advised by the normative texts and prohibited the untouchables entry to its sacred precincts.

The temple was a recognized social institution which sought, however, a special sanction for protection as a sacred centre. Such a sanction was generally conceded. But on occasion it was not. When a king was in a political or financial crisis he might loot the temples: a case in point being the king of Kashmir, Harṣadeva, who in the eleventh century faced an economic crisis and decided to despoil the temples in his kingdom in order to obtain their abundant wealth. He appointed a special officer, the *devotpāṭana-nāyaka*, to do so.[6] Alternatively, the richer temples became the target for greedy Turks and Afghans who seized their wealth. In other instances, where the acquisition of wealth had less priority, the attack on the temple may well have been for religious reasons or else arising out of social or political hostility, as possibly in the case of the Vīraśaivas, or of Aurangzeb. In such cases religion is used to validate a variety of causes. Inevitably for the historian, the temple is more than just a place with a religious identity, and when temples are attacked the reasons can be manifold. The transformation of the original, simple *deva-griha* housing the deity, which was the genesis of the temple, into what was often called the *prāsāda* or palace touched many levels of social, political and economic existence other than the obviously religious. What may be functionally religious can have other functions as well which supersede the sect and speak to the society.

I have discussed three distinct cultural categories—the *praśasti* or eulogy, the *stūpa* and the temple. These are frequently referred to

[6] *Rājataraṅginī*, VII, 1081–1095.

when we speak today of India's cultural heritage from the past. I have tried to suggest that, common to them all, is the interaction between the creator of the cultural idiom and the patron, that the idiom itself is not independent of this relationship, but that in this process an institution is born which has a wide social relevance. By institution I do not mean only a public organization, but an integrated, organized behaviour-pattern through which social control is exercised. This comes to include the recognition of a social reference point which evolves out of the existence of the form, but may not originally have been envisaged as part of the form. The bard or the poet is seemingly only concerned with the *rājā*, but his composition as a *praśasti* becomes a cultural form. This, in turn, reflects on the role of the bard in relation to the *rājā*, and also fixes certain functions of the bard in society where the bard becomes the legitimizer of the king but can, also, for this reason, articulate a protest against the king. The trader and the artisan are concerned with the *sangha*, but both the *stūpa* and the nature of donations to it impinge on a large range of social concerns, involving the status of the donor as well as the function of the *sangha* in society, which function changes when the donors change. I have tried to show that it gives expression to a range of actual articulation which goes beyond just the aesthetic or religious appeal of the *stūpa* or *caitya*. A king donates wealth for a temple built by an architect. From this is born a parallel institution to existing ones, with a multiplicity of social roles. The temple has a horizontal nexus with its patrons which is based on a relatively equal exchange of wealth for legitimation and the social recognition of piety. But it also has a vertical nexus with those who keep it going, which endorses and legitimizes a hierarchy of unequal status and dependence, as well as an inequality of social access to the goods and services of the temple. The temple, therefore, has also to be seen as an institution, as was the *sangha* earlier, and has to be assessed as a social and political statement apart from its religious function. In each case a new cultural idiom is created, a new cultural signal. But our recognition, comprehension and acceptance of this signal should go beyond the creator and the patron, and should include a recognition of its social reference point. In our present-day recognition of the idiom we frequently neglect the institution which it gives rise to and interpret the signal in too narrow a way. An understanding of the signal involves more than just an appreciation of its religious or aesthetic form.

In the three examples which I have discussed, patronage in each

case picks up a seminal form and develops it almost to the point of losing the original. It encapsulates within it a relationship of exchange, which not only relates the patron to the object of patronage but introduces a further relationship between the object and society. This relationship has many manifestations and often goes beyond what may originally have been the purpose of the object.

Each of these three examples also supports three distinct notions of authority which were prevalent in the Indian past and which, it has been argued, are among its civilizational symbols. The eulogy focuses on political authority. The *stūpa* draws on the institution of *bhikkhu*s or renouncers who, on joining the order, discontinued their normal social obligations but created an alternative society. The temple symbolizes the authority of the priestly function. These notions of authority were distinct, but there was some overlap in the practice of this authority: the bard had in part a status similar to that of the renouncer in as much as he was often seen as outside the normal hierarchy of caste and, at the same time, evolved a ritual which gave him a special sanction: the alternative society of the renouncer gave rise to a kind of moral authority which could impinge on social behaviour and political action: the priest drew strength from investing political authority with elements of divinity and used the sanction of ritual and worship to control social action. These were civilizational symbols whose outer forms varied somewhat when dynasties changed or new religions were introduced or when new kinds of political action were required. But the message of the symbol rather than its literal form constituted a continuity in Indian history. Such symbols reach out to many manifestations of social and individual life. To confine them to merely the aesthetic or the religious or the purely formal is to fail to comprehend them in their totality.

I have tried to show that a cultural form has its own history and that its mutation is related to changing historical contexts. To see it as part of a historical continuum provides nuances which introduce a variety of insights into the form. I have given only a partial view of such insights. Added to this, the redefinition of the concept of culture encourages an emphasis on the social context in which a cultural form is placed. This provides fresh perspectives and reinforces the significance of the historical process to the understanding of cultural traditions and symbols.

The keepers and recorders of the past are in greater demand when groups, communities and societies are searching for identities. For

each of these there are critical points in time when, for various reasons, identities have to be clarified, sharpened and given a direction. Cultural identities may seem innocuous, but more often than not, are equally strongly motivated as other identities, since, in effect, they incorporate social behaviour and actions. Groups in society select and propagate those cultural symbols which they can control.

Our selection of cultural forms today has been inevitably conditioned by the historical experience of the last two centuries. The projection was based on an image of an ideal society closely observing normative texts. The cultural traditions so selected emphasized upper-caste values, other-worldliness, religious tolerance and a rather simplistic notion of a community, all of which were taken back to an early past. The current re-assertion of cultural identities directed towards the needs of nation-building requires of us a deeper analysis of cultural traditions and symbols. It is not sufficient that we echo and re-echo what has been said in the past few decades. This becomes particularly relevant when culture as defined in a narrow sense is sought to be made the basis of a national identity.

Let me, then, repeat that we should be aware of the cultural traditions which we are creating and what goes into the making of a tradition: that normative values have to be juxtaposed with social reality if we are to understand the contribution of each; that the study of alternative traditions will provide us with a clearer image even of what we regard as established traditions and the manner in which they relate to others; that the selection of symbols which are constituted into a tradition are seldom random and generally have a purpose which should not go unnoticed; that such cultural symbols are not solely aesthetic forms or religious forms but have a social reference point.

The continuity of culture, therefore, cannot be viewed merely as some kind of mystic communication from one generation to another, where the people involved are mute recipients. When cultural traditions seek legitimacy from history, thereby imprinting themselves on the perception of the present, and are used as building blocks in the construction of contemporary identities, then the voice of the historian has perforce to be heard.